

Marine Sergeant's Fate Hinges

By Ed Lowe
Newsday

QUANTICO, Va.—For half an hour Thursday a voice, supposedly that of a U.S. Marine, Jon M. Sweeney Jr., of West Babylon, L.I., filled a hot, crowded courtroom in Lejeune hall here.

The voice was on eight tape recordings. Five relatives of the young Marine, promoted to sergeant while listed as a prisoner of war, sat listening to it, faces stiff to hide the emotions behind them. The voice was the heart of the prosecution's

case on charges of desertion; that Sweeney had not only deserted but aided the enemy by broadcasting messages to U.S. soldiers in Vietnam. The tapes were saying:

"If any of you people over here in 'Nam think you are fighting for freedom and justice and democracy . . . you're kidding yourselves. I think most of you realize by this time that you are not fighting in Vietnam to defend the United States. Most of you know you are being used as hired killers for the Saigon bandits . . ."

" . . . I have deserted from

the United States Marine Corps. I did this because I love my country, but deserted because I could not stand to see the youths of my country dying uselessly for a war that is contrary to every ideal for which America stands. I have deserted because I could not kill Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese people have never done any harm to my country . . . If you love your country as much as I do, you must refuse to take part in this criminal war. You must demand that the United States government end this war of aggression. You must demand that the U.S. government wipe out poverty

and starvation and racial injustice in the United States.

" . . . From Jon M. Sweeney, Pvt. 1st Class, United States Marine Corps. To black GIs in South Vietnam. How many of you think you're fighting for freedom in 'Nam? The answer is probably not. Most of you know where your fight is at. Most of you know that the place where the black man has to fight for his freedom is not in Vietnam, but America . . . Any of you think the black man is free in the United States, then when you return try to sit in the white section of any restaurant in Selma, Alabama. Then you'll see how

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much freedom the black man has."

At least one of the spectators said the first two of the eight tapes sounded like two distinctly different voices. One was deep and resonant, with a slightly British accent. The other was high, with nasal New England overtones.

"I want to know where the hell Jon got the Oxford accent and the deep voice,"

said Thomas Fitzpatrick, of West Babylon, Jon's uncle. "I've listened to him talk for 22 years and I didn't recognize any of that."

"We lost a battle here today," said the young Marine's father, Jon M. Sweeney Sr., "but the war isn't over yet."

The battle had been waged by Gerald Alch, of F. Lee Bailey's Boston law firm, against admission of

the tapes in evidence. Alch argued mainly that evidence the tapes were authentic was lacking.

Military Judge B. Raymond Perkins, a Navy captain, overruled all his objections and ordered the tapes played.

The trial was adjourned until Monday. Then prosecuting attorney Capt. William Palmer is expected to attempt to establish a CBS

newscast of Nov. 27 as a confession by Sweeney that he did make the tapes for the Vietcong.

In an interview with commentator Mike Wallace, Sweeney supposedly told of his stay in the POW camp and of his apparent cooperation with the enemy claiming that he was trying to "con" his way out of North Vietnam. Sweeney returned to this country last summer.